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ART. XII.—*On the modern Deities worshipped by the Hindus in the Dekkan.* By the REV. J. STEVENSON, D.D.

(Read April 3, 1841.)

THE religion of the Hindus of the Dekkan seems to me to consist of four constituent parts; 1st. Pure Brahmanism, as contained in the Vedas and Puranas; 2nd. An ante-Brahmanical worship, consisting in the adoration of painted stones, which are not acknowledged as objects of worship by the Brahmans, but considered as the representatives of demons; 3d. Buddhism, or that modification of it which subsists among the Jains; and under which heads falls the worship of the Pandharpur Vitthoba. 4. A local superstition based on Brahmanism, and consisting of the worship of remarkable persons who have arisen in the Maratha country in times comparatively modern. It is to these modern local deities that I now solicit attention.

The first in order of the modern deities is Khandoba, as he is usually termed by way of respect, or more properly Khande Ráo. This name may have been given him from his breaking the hosts of his enemies, or from his wearing a particular kind of sword called in Marathi, *khándá*. His Sanskrit name is Mallári, which has been given him from the Daitya he vanquished. This name is corrupted into Mahbár. There is a legend relative to this deity called the Mallári Mahatmya, which professes to belong to the Kshetra Kanda of the Brahmánda Purána. It is a dialogue between Párvati and Mahadeva, the latter of whom merely repeats what Sanat Kumára narrated formerly to the sages engaged in performing austerities in the Naimisha forest. The scene of this romance is laid at a low range of hills called in Sanskrit the Mani Chúdá (Jewel cliff), and in Marathi, Khade Pathár (Table-land above the cliff.) The town of Jejuri, which lies about thirty miles east from Poonah, is built close to its western extremity. At this place, according to the legend, certain Brahmans were interrupted in their devotions by a Daitya called Malla, who with his brother Mani and a great army, while on a plundering or hunting expedition, trod down their gardens, killed their cow, and beat and ill used the Brahmans and their families. As the word Malla, meaning a wrestler, is by no means an uncommon surname, it is probable that in reference to this attack, we may be on historical ground. Malla

is the surname of many of the sovereigns of Nepal, during several centuries; but had our Daitya come from such a distance as that, the legend would not have been confined to the Maratha country, beyond which I believe it has scarcely ever travelled. Malla is also the surname of a king of Malwa of the thirteenth century, but a Hindu king would hardly have distressed the Brahmans in the way here narrated, and would certainly at least never have killed their cow. In Sir John Malcolm's account of the Bhils, in the first volume of the *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society*, mention is made of a powerful tribe of these freebooters, who derive their origin from a place called Toran Mall. Their remotest ancestor, in the same account, is said to have murdered a Brahman, and carried off his daughter; and one of their patriarchs, Kunda Ráná, with his brothers, to have conquered and ruled over all the surrounding country. By some one of that tribe probably the Brahmans were oppressed when they called in the aid of some other local prince called Khande Ráo. However this may be, the Mahatmya now leaves the earth, and carries us with the Brahmans along the ethereal way to heaven. Arriving first at Amarávati, the residence of Indra, the sages made known to him their griefs. He receives them with respect, but confesses himself unable to yield them any aid. He however directs them to Vishnu. In process of time they arrive at Vaikuntha. Vishnu treats them in the same manner, and directs them to Siva. Siva listens to their prayer, becomes incarnate as Martanda¹ Bhairava, and slays the armies of their Daityas, along with their leaders Mani and Malla. Both of the Daitya captains are converted to the worship of Mahadeva before their death, and, in dying, receive from the hands of the god emancipation from separated existence, and absorption into the deity. This is the common Brahmanical way of disposing of such converts, the guardian deities justly fearing that the Daitya, if let loose again in this world, would once more relapse into their heresy of Brahmahatya. The worship of Vishnu, Ganesa, and Bhavánl are mentioned with respect in the Mahatmya; and these are the principal Hindu deities besides Mahadeva, which at this day are venerated by the Maráthas. Several of the great Hindu tirthas, and others that are local, are extolled. The Champaka Shashti is directed to be held particularly sacred to Mallári. It is the sixth day of the increase of the moon in the month Márgasirsha (November-December.) This is the great day accordingly at

¹ This particular Bhairava is not mentioned in the usual list.

Jejurí, where Khandoba's principal temple is. It formerly stood on the top of the hill, but on being re-edified by Malhár Ráo Holkár, the first famous Maratha leader of that name, whose family god Khande Ráo was, the site was changed to a level spot, but a little way from the base of the mountain. The approach is by a pretty broad flight of stone stairs. After ascending a little way, you come to a landing-place, where is Khandoba's shepherd, with a herd of rocky buffaloes, cows, and horses, the gift of devotees, whose cattle have recovered from sickness after making vows to the god. Higher up you come to a second landing-place, where is his prime minister, whom tradition affirms to have been of the merchant caste. The third landing-place is the platform of the temple. The giant Malla, who is here outside by Khandoba's horse, first receives a kiss from the worshippers, a boon granted him on his conversion by the god. Inside there is the image of Khande Ráo and his wife Mhálsá, placed behind a Linga, which is raised a little from the floor. It is said also that Vishnu's image is somewhere inside. It is singular enough that the same Malhár Ráo, who rebuilt the temple on the hill, should also have built at the bottom of it another temple to the Linga, behind the symbol of Mahadeva, in which he placed the image of himself and his wife Ahalyá (Ailyá) Báí; intimating, I suppose, that his family had as good a claim to divine honours as that of the deified chief Khande Ráo, and they do receive them from numerous worshippers. Ahalyá Báí, so famous for her virtues and donations to the Brahmans, has also a temple built for her at Nasik, where she is worshipped as an incarnation of Bhaváni. Holkar not only rebuilt the temple at Jejurí, but endowed it with an annual grant of ten thousand rupees. A like sum was granted by the Peshwa's government, which has hitherto been continued by the English. The annual gifts by devotees in horses, cows, cloth, &c. &c., are considerable, and are sold and carried to account. The English government, as the Peshwa's had done before, used to receive a certain share of these donations, taking back with the one hand part of what they had given with the other, till this branch of revenue was relinquished by Sir Robert Grant. Probably the whole revenues of the place amount to thirty thousand rupees per annum. On this money a large establishment is kept up, consisting of image dressers; a fraternity of vira (heroes,) amounting, perhaps, to about fifty individuals, and a sisterhood of twice the number of Murali. One of the vira is required at the annual festival to run a sword through his thigh, and afterwards to walk through all the town

as if nothing had happened to him. This he generally is able to perform, as amid the excitement of the mob, and with the constant motion, the fresh wound does not pain him much, and he is besides well stimulated by bhang and other exhilarating drugs. The power, however, to parade the town with his wounded leg is considered miraculous. It is also pretended that the wound never after pains him, though one of my informants ingenuously confessed that he is usually obliged to keep his bed for six weeks after, and that it also sometimes happens to prove fatal.

The Murali are unmarried females, consecrated by their parents to the god, and sent, when they grow up, to the temple at Jejuri. This insult to public morals, under the garb of religion, is by no means approved of by the more respectable part of the population. I have even known a Brahman who, in travelling, would not even lodge a night in the town, lest the disgrace of such an action should cling to him all his life. Probably this institution owes its origin to the harem of the deified Ráo, who having been in the habit of levying such a contribution during his life, it continued to be paid after his death. The male attachés of the temple also are accused of unnatural crimes, and altogether the fame of the place is so bad that the philanthropist and the Christian must feel more than ordinary regret that the English government has not yet been able to find an honourable way of withdrawing itself from all connexion with such a system, and devoting the money which goes to uphold such an institution to the promotion of the moral and intellectual culture of the unlettered population around it; a reform which, I am fully assured, would be hailed by a great majority of the Hindus.

Although from the local nature of the worship of Khande Ráo, the surname of Ráo, and the engrafting of this worship on the more ancient adoration of the Linga, it would appear to be comparatively modern, still we cannot trace its origin by the light of authentic history. It is otherwise with the worship of Morabá, in whose person, and afterwards in his descendants, to the seventh generation, the god Ganpati (Ganesa,) became incarnate, while the famous Sivaji, who himself has been called an incarnation of Bhaváni, was establishing the Marátha empire. The history of Morabá and his family, and the miracles he and they are said to have performed, and the endowments in consequence made to his temple will be found at sufficient length in the fifth volume of the *Asiatic Researches*, and the third of the *Transactions of the Bombay Literary Society*. The seven generations during which Ganpati promised to

become incarnate in the family of Morabá, have now passed away, and his family has become extinct; yet everything goes on at Chinchwad (Chinchore) as before, and the adopted son of the last incarnate Ganpati is still venerated as a deity. Nor is it likely that this Brahmanical Lama will ever put an end to his transmigrations till the era of the emancipation of the human mind from the degrading bonds of superstition.

Another very singular proof of Hindu credulity was exhibited a few years ago, under our own eyes, in the universal belief which prevailed that Vishnu had again become incarnate among men in the person of a boy in the Sattara territories. Various accounts of this pretended incarnation were published in the Indian periodicals of the day¹, yet as these may not have found their way to Europe, we shall briefly glance at the principal facts of this history.

Naráyana Powár, commonly called by way of respect, Naráyan Báuá, was the son of a Kunbi, a man of the cultivator class. The surname of Powár, however, is that of one of the Maratha nobles, and like others of them, pretends to a Rájput origin, to a connexion with Puár, altered by the Greeks, it has been supposed, to Porus. It was in 1830 that this boy, when between nine and ten years of age, all on a sudden became an object of notoriety. He was bold and daring, and had learned to catch venomous serpents. The Patel, or head man of Pimpavada, a village situated about sixteen miles to the north of Sattara, and where the boy lived, aided by the Kulkarni, or village-clerk, soon spread his fame over the adjacent districts. Crowds of people, from all quarters, flocked to see him. It was given out that he was an incarnate god. The blind, the lame, the leprous flocked from all quarters expecting miraculous cures. A pool in the small river that runs by the village was converted into a tirtha, and money demanded for permission to bathe there; at the same time no one could approach the new god empty handed. The then Raja of Sattara and all his great men visited this incarnate Naráyan. The Kulkarni, with the most unblushing effrontery, published in the vulgar Marathi, a long list of lepers, and blind, and lame, that had been cured at Pimpavada, and the Patel went as far as Poonah, spreading the fame of his village incarnation over the country. Abhangs² were published also in the praise of Naráyan, and a poem of Tulsidás was altered and inter-

¹ See especially the *Bombay Oriental Christian Spectator*, vol. i.

² The Abhang is a kind of ode.

polated to proclaim the greatness he was destined to attain. It was given out in this interpolated poem that the principal work of the new incarnation would be to expel the English; after which he himself should sit on the throne of Dehli. The reign of the English, it had been decreed, it was said, should continue for fifteen years, but that now in the year Nanda¹, the third from the time the new god had made his appearance, their empire should be broken to pieces. Long before this time, however, the poor boy had finished his earthly career, for in about six months after he came into notoriety, he perished by the bite of a snake, which some Rákshasa², in the shape of a low-caste Mahár, had brought to test his divinity. This Mahár was a snake-catcher himself, and no doubt was moved with envy at the honours paid to one whom he deemed his inferior. In many villages there are Muráthas that can catch snakes. They go about their work without any of the paraphernalia of the snake-catchers from the upper provinces. They usually follow some other profession, and exercise this only when occasion requires. When sent for by the inmates of a house where a serpent has been discovered, they go in their common clothes, carrying nothing but their usual cotton plaid. Without any pipe, simply by a whistling noise they make with their mouth, they allure the serpent from his hiding-place. Continuing the same whistling noise, and repeating a mantra, or short prayer, to some one of their gods, they slowly approach; when near enough they make a spring at the snake, dropping the cotton plaid with the one hand on its head, and with the other seizing the reptile as near the back of the neck as possible. Should the snake have room to turn round its head and attempt to bite the hand that detains it, the numerous folds of the cotton plaid fill its mouth, and prevent it from doing any harm. It is now laid hold of higher up, and while the catcher keeps it fast, an assistant comes and extracts the poisonous fangs, after which, if it be a cobra di capello, it is let loose into the jungles, as it would be deemed a heinous crime to do it further injury. This is the process they follow, as I have been informed by one of themselves, as well as by other credible witnesses. The only thing that seems at first sight startling is the capacity of the snake for music, but many animals are excited and attracted by music. Certain notes enrage the lion, and others calm him, as has been determined in London by experi-

¹ That is, from 1818, when the Peshwa's dominions were annexed to their empire.

² A demon, such was the theory of his votaries.

ment; why should not the same thing take place in reference to serpents?

But this is a digression. It might have been supposed that after the death of the boy of Pimpavada in the manner narrated, the excitement would at once have subsided. This was far however from being the case. It was given out in three or four different places, some of them such as Bombay and Poonah, a hundred miles distant, that Naráyana had risen again, or that his divine spirit had had gone to animate some other body, when driven by the Rákshasa from the Kunbi of Pimpavada; and that the death of the boy was but a stratagem of the deity, more effectually to execute his purpose. The death of their Apis, however, had taken the priestly attendants of Naráyana by surprise, and they had no one ready with the proper marks to substitute instead of the departed object of their worship, and thus in a few weeks the general excitement throughout the country subsided. One of the ludicrous scenes that were exhibited while it lasted had its origin at Narnaf near Severndroog (Suvarna-durga.) A poor weaver, passing through the village one afternoon, was taken ill. Fearing for the consequences, he went into a temple, and prostrated himself before the images. His illness consisting mainly in fatigue, he there, in that position, fell fast asleep. Some of the villagers coming to the temple in the dusk, and seeing a stranger in this odd posture, concluded that it could be none other than the resuscitated Naráyana. Off they went to collect the whole village posse to come to pay their respects to the incarnate god. The weaver was awakened by the rushing in of the crowd to present him with gifts, and to fall down before him in adoration. Instead, however, of being disconcerted at the new honours which fell on him so thick, with that admirable tact and self-possession which Hindus often display, he sat up and received all the people had to give, exactly as if it had been his due, and after they were gone again composed himself for sleep. Early in the morning some of the wiser sort thought that it might not be amiss to inquire more particularly into the claims of the object of their last night's adoration. The weaver candidly confessed that he never had made any pretensions to a supernatural character, but had merely received what the people had given; and so the matter ended.

It might have been supposed, after all this, that a universal confession would have been extorted of the unsoundness of Naráyan Powár's claims to divinity. But no, a tomb was erected to his memory, where he is still worshipped as a departed god. The Rev.

R. Nesbit, in passing through the village in 1834, describes the state in which he found things as follows: "The boy is buried at the spot where he first received divine worship. His little coat is spread over the slightly elevated mound that surmounts his ashes; his shoes are placed at the lower end of it; and a piece of shining metal at the head to represent his face. The stick he used to bear in his hand lies at the side of the tomb. . . Two Brahmans, one of the Dekkan, and another from Hindostan, as well as a shepherd who has turned religious devotee, wait upon him continually with music, singing, burning of incense, &c. . . . The boy's relations became rich by the offerings made to him during his life; and they seem determined to employ his tomb as a source of profit now that he is dead."

There are many other modern deities worshipped by the Maráthas, but those I have mentioned are some of the principal.

In reading such accounts, the mind that has been freed from the bondage of superstition is too apt to turn away with disgust, and look down with contempt on a nation that can be the dupes of such impostures. Let us endeavour, however, rather to seek relief in the homely proverb that "the richest soil produces the rankest weeds." Let us consider what a noble field this must be for intellectual and moral culture, where there is so much mental energy and enthusiasm to expend upon objects which, possessed of no inherent dignity, are rendered great merely by an effort of imagination. The so-much talked of apathy of the Hindu mainly arises from the want of a congenial object about which to exercise the mind; there is no want of sensitiveness when such an object is presented. In the eager desire manifested by the youth of the present day to become acquainted with the English language and literature, where do we discover any Hindu apathy? The subtlety of argument and flights of imagination the Brahmans in former times have exhibited in expounding an ethereal philosophy and a material religion, ought to encourage the hope that when philosophy has been brought down from heaven to earth, and religion directed to the worship of that Spirit who requires to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, a new race of Hindu philosophers and divines will yet be seen adorning their respective walks of literature.